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**FASHION ACCESSORIES FROM ANKARA WAX PRINTS  
IN NIGERIA**

**The purpose** of this study is to provide preliminary art history of the accessories made from Ankara fabrics and make a scholastic record of the production of the accessories with the use of Ankara wax print fabrics in Nigeria. The ephemerality nature of fabrics with creativity, innovation and the dearth of literary materials in this area of art make the study to be expedient.

**Methodology:** this study adopts both descriptive and explanatory research designs to carry out the research with qualitative method in analyzing the data. The sources of data are from both primary and secondary sources making the data to be concise and effective.

**Result:** the study identified that the cotton texture and colourful designs make the accessories to be easily produced without stress. Therefore, many accessories for fashion are produced daily showing African nature in day-to-day dressing.

**Scientific novelty:** the study discovered the usefulness of African fabrics and wears which could be publicize rather than the imported fabrics and wears being widely used in Nigeria which will be of great value in Nigerian fashion system.

**Practical significance:** the findings of this research reveal that Ankara wax prints transcends sewing the fabric into dress wears. Inspirations are increasing daily, and the fabric is becoming more popular in the market world. With the technology in place and the taste of the consumers dictate the kind of styles and accessories to be created for the users.

**Keywords:** Ankara wax print, ephemeral, Nigerian art, designs, adire (tie/dye) motif, creativity, innovations, fashion accessories.

**Introduction.** Ankara is a fabric fondly called African fabric in Nigeria. It is a type of cloth for those who want to be fashionable and those who are interested in wearing designed clothes that are stylish with accessories matching the type of Ankara worn on a very special occasion. Ankara fabrics are considerably cheap, and they are in varieties of colours. The colourful nature of the fabrics with the expertise ideas of some artists who are making fortune out of the accessories produced from the fabrics make ways for the fabrics to be more acceptable in Nigeria. In the olden days, the fabrics were meant for the poor and the village women [1]. But today, the fabric has undergone a magic transformation to become a choice of the rich and famous [2] also noted this by saying that 'fabric which were once considered as out of fashion has changed to become a sizzling fad'.

Nowadays, Ankara fabric has become an inevitable part of any social functions. Fashion

refers to the newest creations of textile designers and so, the fashion designers, having sensed this trend, are continually producing appealing designs to capture the apparel market [3] reiterated that Ankara designs already have influence on the international world of fashion and lifestyle, and they are inspirational source for designers and companies. The appeal of the finished product depends on the creativity, and skills of the designer.

**Analysis of previous research.** Ankara was originally known as wax resists dyed fabric (also known as batik which is of Indian origin). It was reported that batik diffused from India to Indonesian islands and Japan, and later perfected by the Japanese before the thirteenth century [4]. It is a technique for dyeing fabric and had been developed into an art form in Java and Indonesia by the nineteenth century [5; 6]. Nevertheless, Ankara is a term used in Nigeria and some other parts of West Africa, especially, Ghana and Ivory Coast to identify the

fabrics that are printed with machine using wax resist and dyes to achieve the effect of batik on both sides of the cloth. This is to imitate a wax type of product [6; 7].

*Ankara* as a fabric has vibrant patterns of very rich colourful designs. It is generally made of 100% cotton or cotton poly materials which are largely produced in Nigeria. *Ankara* fabrics became extremely popular over time, and it is usually worn as everyday casual outfit customized to suit the designs of the wearer. *Ankara* was introduced to Nigeria from Dutch and so, it was usually referred to as Dutch Wax [8; 9; 10]. It was then of very high quality, with exorbitant price and unaffordable by the poor. Later, the Turks from Ankara (the name of the Capital City of Turkey which was formerly known as Angora) produced a cheaper version of the high quality for the benefit of those who could not afford the high prices of the Dutch. So, the fabric was changed from Dutch wax to *Ankara* [11; 12]. The production of the fabric for the West African markets [13] started since the nineteenth century. It is consequently referred to as African fabric [14]. In East Africa, the fabric is known as Kanga and in Zambia and Southern Africa; it is called Chitenge or Kitenge. Even though fashion in Nigeria and all over the world is dynamic, the *Ankara* fabric has been able to stand the test of time [15].

**Statement of the problem.** Even though making accessories with *Ankara* fabrics is a skill that is very vast in Nigeria, there has not been serious scholarly attention paid to its usage in fashion in Nigeria. There are also problems of the ephemeral nature of the fabric coupled with lack of preservation by the fashion designers and users of the accessories. Tracking the trends or trajectories of the development of this aspect of textile art tradition later will therefore become difficult or impossible. Hence, the present study is pertinent.

Against this background, this study is an art history of fashion accessories in Nigeria with the use of *Ankara* over a period of ten (10) years. In terms of scope, the study covered the period between 2008 and 2018. The study was

conducted with the aim of making a scholastic record of the production of fashion accessories with the use of *Ankara* fabrics in Nigeria. This will eventually be useful for the future fashion designers who will want to venture into the skill for continuity before it gets out of fashion.

**Methodology.** Be that as it may, the paper investigates the origin of *Ankara* fabric, its usage forms and accessories making out of the fabrics in Nigeria in particular. The study was based on field research conducted in Nigeria between 2008 and 2018. Fashion accessories with the use of *Ankara* in the market and in individual collections in Nigeria were considered. Some fashion designers and users of the accessories were interviewed with a view to eliciting from them the required information. The study adopts descriptive research design. Since it is a theory-based design method, the data were gathered, analyzed, and presented.

**The results of the research and their discussion.**

**Typology of *Ankara*.** *Ankara* fabrics in Nigeria are generally of two types: resist prints called 'wax', which has colours that last longer called "*Ankara nla*", in Yoruba language, that is, big, expensive, and slow to fade type of *Ankara*; and then there is roller prints called 'fancy', which can fade away easily called "*Ankara kekere*", that is, inferior and cheap *Ankara*. Both wax and fancy are produced in Nigeria and sold in a standard size that coincides with the amount of cloth it takes to make a woman's wrapper, which is six (6) yards (5,49 meters). The fabrics are of various grades. Some of them are; Real Dutch Wax, Nichem, Veritable English Wax, Veritable Dutch Wax, Hitarget and Holladaise, Java Gold, Real English Wax, Guaranteed Super Woodina Prints, Guaranteed Real Wax Beauty Lady BTL, Veritable Block Wax HIFASHION, Veritable Java Print, English Gold, Super Woodin, London Woodin, etc [16]. Many of these types of *Ankara* could be found in stalls depending on the financial capacity of the seller. Some of these merchants sell in wholesales, some of them sell in retail and some of them sell both in wholesale and retail.

Significantly, in quality, durability and price, wax and fancy are conceived as two parts of a whole in Africa and are valued in ways that are related to their market value. Both are linked through historical associations and frequently prized for the feelings of nostalgia that they can motivate. This kind of value is rooted in the importance of textiles of all sorts throughout West and Central Africa, not only as commodities, but also as symbols of wealth and a means of communicating ideas, thus bringing innovations in printing coupled with taste of fashion.

With many innovations and the ability of designers to respond to the ever-changing taste of fashion, soon, their designs gained more popularity. European factory designers began to imitate indigenous designs like tie and dye designs, batik designs, etc to compete with the indigenous industry. These are popularly called *Ankara* Kampala known for their printed imitations of the *adire* motifs of the Yoruba by textile factories having nearly all the techniques of *adire*. Imported wax prints, not only from Europe but also from Asia, flooded the Nigerian local markets, at low prices. Interestingly, the Japanese duplicated designs of "*adire eleko*" and tie-dye designs and used the designs to manufacture clothes for the Nigerian markets [16; 17].

**Usage forms of *Ankara* fabrics.** *Ankara* prints are principally adorned by women and are worn as clothing and accessories to match the clothes they put on. *Ankara* is a type of fabric that is highly cherished in Nigeria. Due to its uniqueness in aesthetical appeal, colour and design motifs, it is usually held in such a high esteem. The use of *Ankara* is at times specific and can also reveal the wearer's identity and status [18]. The uniqueness of *Ankara* to communicate both specific by its design, motifs, name, and by implication the taste, style and affluence of its wearer adds to its importance. *Ankara* could serve as a social function and day-to-day clothing.

**Fashion accessories with *Ankara*.** Fashion is a general term for a popular style or

practice, especially in clothing, footwear, accessories, makeup, body piercing, or furniture. It is a habitual trend in the style in which a person dresses in the prevailing styles. Production of accessories for fashion needs passion, and to have passion for fashion, there is need to be inspired, it is this idea that will bring innovation and creativity, the innovation and creativity will bring uniqueness. When the artist is unique, he will be outstanding among others. When he is outstanding, he can think critically. It takes a lot of skills and mental calculation to make any of the *Ankara* accessories. The skill is a form of technique that requires time, patience and technical knowledge.

It becomes interesting for the artists and those around them when there is passion for the skill. This is a craft that gives the artist a sense of self-worth, accomplishment and fulfillment if he is able to manipulate different shades of colours to create wonderful bags, shoes and jewelries as the case may be. Most interestingly, is the fact that used old bags with peeling leather skin can be transformed into new bodies with *Ankara*. This is also applicable to shoes, because, wrapping of old bags and shoes with *Ankara* fabrics elongates the life span of the product. This is known as recycling. This helps to save people from the financial ordeal of purchasing new bags for wrapping.

As fashion accessories, *Ankara* prints fabric has infinite creative applications like shoes, bags, slippers and bag to match, bangles, hair and neck piece, brooch and hair clip, bibs and earrings, shoes and, etc. Styles and designs available for this cloth are endless which makes all people, men and women, young and the aged became glued to it. Fashion accessories are items that are used to match the wearer's outfit. They are decorative items that complement one's garment. These include jewelry, gloves, handbags, hats, belts, scarves, watches, watches, sunglass, and pins. Style-conscious men and women make efforts to add accessories to complement their attire whether it is used for a party, dinner, casual or

office. With creativity and innovation, the artist is able to dress other people up because your accessories indicate who you are and they also can help to project your image.

**Making Ankara accessories.** *Ankara* fabrics have been gaining popularity in Nigeria nowadays. Therefore, they are useful in making accessories. The fabric has successfully become part of fashion accessories in Nigeria in particular [19]. The uniqueness of the fabric is that it is vibrant and beautiful. There are various accessories that could be produced with *Ankara* fabrics. Some of these are earrings (loop, button, drop), bangles, belts, brooches, hairpieces, pocket squares, neck pieces and neck chains, rings, hand fans, wallets, phone pouches, sun shades, head band, flower pouch, note books and cake decorations. Others are shoes (high heels, flats), bags (school bags, sling, and baskets), slippers, purses and clutches, souvenirs, etc. The fashion designers could creatively exhibit their skills in any of these accessories without repeating designs.

Tools and materials needed for the production of the above are scissors, thread and needle, UHU gum, chain hooks and clasps, felt, interfacing, ribbon elastic, clips and bands, pins, lining, adhesive, craft glue, thin cardboard.

*Ankara* button earrings are made using metal-based plastics. Needle is used to remove the plastic from the metal-base. Then, *Ankara* fabric of their choice is cut to place the earring on the material. UHU gum is applied on the inner side of the plastic and the excess fabric is tucked inside. The plastic parts firmly inside the metal base, allow it to dry. When it is well dried, it is ready for use. The *Ankara* bib necklace is also used to accessorize the dressing making a perfect combination with the attire worn, as shown in Fig. 1.

The fashion designers are very vast in the making of *Ankara* clutch bags (Fig. 2). The materials used comprise perforator, *Ankara* piece, aluminum chain or jewelry, coral beads (spiky ones), office pins, UHU gum, fabric stay, scissors, tape measure, embroidery yarn, chalk. The fabric is usually placed in a position

whereby the sides are even together. Chalk is applied to mark out the edges of the clutch on the fabric. Extra inches of fabric around the markings are left while cutting with scissors. This is to give room for the folding later.

Place the fabric in any position you want but evenly on both sides. They fold neatly and press with iron to hold the folding in place. The fabric-stay is then pressed again to the *Ankara* fabric with hot iron for thickness. Holes are created for the clasp to snap the clutch in place on both sides. Glue is evenly spread across the surface of the clutch and the fabric is placed over it gently with good smoothen over. At times, holes are punctured in the flap to insert the jewelry such as chain, spikes, or coral beads. Then, the clutches are sewn all around with decorative embroidered stitch. When it is fully dried, it is ready for use. It could be taken to any party or event.

It is also very interesting to see the designers covering already made shoes or sandals with *Ankara* fabrics to match the cloth worn. This dressing creates an explosion effect, and it is very common among ladies that want to look trendy. It is also a good addition to monochrome looks and neutral inspired clothes [20; 21]. The materials are few and the processes are very easy. The materials include *Ankara* fabric, blade, scissors, glue and flowered net lace if desired (Fig. 3).

The high-heeled shoe to be used is on the table with the markings of the areas the lady wants *Ankara* to cover. Glue is applied smoothly on the areas and fabric is used to cover the areas and smoothening with fingers, then the excess fabric is removed with scissors or blade. The heels are also covered with fabrics and well smoothened with fingers. In some occasions, the shoe is left to dry for use, but in other occasions, further work is done on the shoe by applying glue again on the shoe and covering it with flowered net lace with the fingers to smoothen it again and about half an inch is left to fold in before cutting the excess with either blade or scissors. It is then allowed to dry very well before it is ready for use.

*Ankara* handbag (Fig.4) is also an accessory that was trendy among the ladies between 2008 and 2018. *Ankara* handbags make the users to be different from the crowd. They give the lady an astounding look of attractive brightness making her very eye-catching among her peers [22]. The materials used for making these fashionable bags are *Ankara* fabric, stud for decoration, strawboard for stability, desired shape of bag, back panel, leather for the lining, leather combined with fabric and glue.

The leather and straw board are to hold the bag in shape and so the two are cut with

scissors to a desired shape [23]. They spread glue smoothly on the leather and then cover it with *Ankara* fabric. Glue is also spread on the strawboard and placed on the leather while smoothing it with hands which will help the bag to serve as back panel. The back panel is also wrapped with *Ankara* fabric giving space for excess fabric to fold in round. Glue is spread on the *Ankara* fabric again and both the leather and the fabric are joined together with glue and smoothed with hands. The excess fabric is tucked inside, and the inside is covered with linen and the zip or clamp is fixed as required. When it is fully dried, it is ready for use.



**Fig. 1.** Ankara bib and earring  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A.,  
2017



**Fig. 2.** Ankara clutch bag and  
slippers Photograph  
by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 3.** Ankara shoes Photograph  
by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 4.** Ankara hand bag  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2015



**Fig. 5.** Cake decoration with Ankara design  
Photograph by Olukemi's blog –  
<https://m.facebook.com>

Decorating cake in *Ankara* design (Fig. 5) is another way in which the designers use to catch the interest of the celebrant and well-wishers who attend the celebration. After the cake has been baked, it is allowed to cool down. The processes are of two types. It is either the

printing is done on paper or done with fondant to cover the cake. The design is first searched for on google or get the photograph of the desired *Ankara* fabric. Edible printing can be done on paper to cover the cake. On the other hand, art paper or ordinary paper on either A3

or A4 could be used to cover the cake. If fondant is to be used, the cake will be covered with fondant measure, cut it out, rub edible glue

on the fondant and get the designs cut pasted. Then, add the border or desired designs of the cake.



**Fig. 6 a** – Bow ties from Ankara fabric  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 6 b** – A man using Ankara bow tie  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 7 a** – Long neck ties  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 7 b** – A man using Ankara long tie  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 8.** Ankara bangle – kamjstyles  
Photograph by Kamj – [www.kamjstyles.com](http://www.kamjstyles.com)



**Fig. 9. a** – Ankara cap styled with black bow  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 9. b** – A little girl wearing Ankara cap  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018



**Fig. 10.** A little girl wearing Ankara elastic headband  
Photograph by Adeoti A.A., 2018

Bow ties (Fig. 6) are mostly used by men. The accessory is very easy to produce as the materials are the fabric, needle and thread, scissors, and elastic band. The fabric is cut into rectangle size of about 8 inches by 14 inches and fold into three equal vertical shapes. It is folded again to tuck the two ends into each other and sew with needle and thread to fasten them together, called 'A'. Another small rectangle size is cut, neatly used to fasten 'A' at the middle tightly inserting elastic band or sew thin Ankara strand long enough to hang it on the neck. A bow tie is produced and easy to wear. Also, long neck ties are predominantly used by men as fashion making the dressing to be unique (Fig. 7).

Bangles (Fig. 8) are also wrapped with *Ankara* fabrics to match the dress worn. The processes are easy, and the materials used are very few. The only materials usually used are the metal or the plastic bangles, *Ankara* fabrics, glue and scissors or blade. The fabric is folded half an inch on the right side. The bangle is held with one hand and the Ankara is placed on it with the other hand. Glue is applied on both the fabric and the bangle, and the fabric is wrapped round the bangle until it is fully covered with fabric with the assurance that the distance between each wrap is equal. The designers are always conscious of the neat finishing while removing the excess fabric with scissors but leaving half an inch for folding inside the bangle. Then, glue is used to hold down the fabric on to the bangle. When it is fully dried, it is ready for use.

Little children are not left out of the Ankara fashion accessories. Head accessories of different shapes and styles can be produced to make astonishing fashion ensemble for them [24; 25] reiterated that head wrapping is a fantastic way to pay tribute to tradition. It could be produced by using the left over Ankara pieces like cap (Fig. 9) head band (Fig. 10), scarf, hair bonnet and fascinator. The picture below shows a small head cap styled with a bow. Get

the size of the head, Use stay material and wrap the stay with the Ankara fabric to cover all the part. Produce a bow of another fabrics and attach to the Ankara cap at the back. Then it is ready for use. So also the head band is produced by using elastic rubber to fasten it to the head, wrap the elastic with Ankara fabric and create a squeeze in the front while the elastic will be at the back. The style brings a burst of decoration and character, transforming ordinary to extraordinary.

**Conclusion.** The creative ingenuity and originality of the designers in creating beautiful outfit, and the skill trend of creating accessories are making *Ankara* fabric more acceptable in the society. The usage of *Ankara* fabric transcends the sewing into dress wears, but the making of the fabrics into fashion accessories of diverse styles for individuals. The usage trend is becoming more interesting and irresistible as the inspiration for the production is becoming higher. Different types of accessories are being produced daily through inspirations.

Ladies are the most prominent people patronizing *Ankara* with lots of accessories in different kinds which is making the fabric to be more acceptable in Nigeria in particular. Wearing an outfit with the same fabric as shoe and bag or other *Ankara* accessories gives the fabric more popularity in the world market. This is why the fabric is now imbibed in fashion shows and seen on international celebrities. The technology in place and the taste of the consumers dictate the kind of styles and accessories to be created for the users. Production of Ankara fabric into fashion accessories is a demonstration of artistry, creativity and social continuousness. The days of the European fashion are gradually fading out of fashion as the Ankara fabric is inculcated into African fashion making the fabric more vibrant for continuity. This is part of the reason *Ankara* is largely and widely used by all irrespective of the class.

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### МОДНІ АКЕСУАРИ З ВОСКОВИХ ПРИНТІВ З АНКАРИ В НІГЕРІЇ

**Мета** дослідження полягає в наданні попередньої історії мистецтва аксесуарів, виготовлених з воскових принтів з Анкари, та створення наукового опису виробництва аксесуарів із використанням воскових принтів з Анкари в Нігерії. Ефемерність тканин, креативність, інновації та відсутність літературних матеріалів у цій галузі мистецтва зумовлюють доцільність дослідження.

**Методологія:** це дослідження використовує описові та пояснювальні методи з використанням якісного методу аналізу даних. Основою даних є як первинні, так і вторинні джерела, що робить дані лаконічними та ефективними.

**Результат:** у дослідженні визначено, що бавовняна текстура та кольорові дизайни дозволяють легко виготовляти аксесуари без зайвих зусиль. Таким чином, щоденно виробляється багато аксесуарів для моди, демонструючи африканський характер у повсякденному одязі.

**Наукова новизна:** дослідження виявило корисність африканських тканин та одягу, які можуть бути популяризовані, замість імпортованих та широко використовуватися в Нігерії, що матиме велику цінність для нігерійської системи фешн-індустрії.

**Практична значущість:** результати цього дослідження показують, що воскові принти Анкари розширюють можливості використання тканини для сукні. Натхнення зростають щодня, а тканина стає все більш популярною на ринку. Сучасні технології та смаки споживачів диктують, які стилі та аксесуари слід створювати для користувачів.

**Ключові слова:** восковий принт Анкари, ефемерність, нігерійське мистецтво, дизайни, мотив "адіре" (вузликове/барвникове), творчість, інновації, модні аксесуари.

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